

Isreal has Many Accomplishments to Celebrate on Independence Day

April 21, 2010

Madam Speaker, Today is Yom Ha'atzmaut--Israel's Independence Day. On this day, Israelis celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel as a place of refuge and national homeland for the Jewish people.

Although Jews have maintained a continuous presence in the Land of Israel for more than 3,000 years, it was not until 1948 that they reestablished a state in their traditional land. Since that time, Israel has faced many challenges to its existence. Neighboring Arab nations have launched wars against Israel and attempted to cripple its economy through boycotts. Terrorists have attacked repeatedly, killing civilians and soldiers alike. Iranian leaders have threatened to ``wipe Israel off the map" and are steadily moving toward acquiring the means to do so. Israel's enemies are engaged in a campaign to delegitimize the Jewish state.

Even in the face of continual efforts to defeat and destroy Israel, the Jewish state has been successful in establishing more peaceful relations with its neighbors and making its people more secure. Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Its efforts to combat terrorism have resulted in a reduction in terrorist attacks--cutting that number in half since 2006. Israel also continues to seek peace with the Palestinians.

Despite overwhelming odds, Israel has not only survived, but it has flourished for the past 62 years. Israel has established a representative democracy with an independent judicial system and strong rule of law. Its citizens are free to worship and speak as they wish.

Israel has also established itself as a world leader in technological innovation. Despite more than half its land being desert, Israelis have ``made the desert bloom," growing food for consumption and export. Its universities are first-rate, producing new generations of artists, entrepreneurs, scientists and doctors. And, despite its size, Israel produces more start ups than many larger nations. In fact, there are more Israeli companies than European companies listed on the NASDAQ exchange.

Israel is also a nation that cares about the fate of others. Immediately after learning of the devastating earthquake in Haiti this January, Israel sent hundreds of its citizens to treat the injured and search for survivors. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported after the earthquake that only an estimated 25 Jews lived in Haiti. But, that didn't stop Israel from committing manpower and money to do everything it could to save and preserve all life in Haiti.

Through struggles and achievements both, the United States has stood by Israel's side. Our nations share many of the same values and are partners in an effort to build a better world.

There are those that argue, however, that the United States would be better off if we distanced ourselves from Israel, if we weakened our alliance. I am here to say that this would be the worst thing we could do. The United States and Israel are both stronger when we work together against common threats. Economic and cultural ties between our two nations enrich the lives of Americans and Israelis. Our friendship is important and must remain strong.

Today, on Israel's Independence Day, I commend the people of Israel for their many remarkable achievements, congratulate them as they celebrate their 62nd anniversary of independence, and look forward to many more years of friendship and cooperation between our two nations.